

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims 1-9: (Canceled).

10. (New) A method for inerting anodes of fuel cells, comprising steps of:
supplying water vapor to the anodes of the fuel cells; and
applying an external voltage to the fuel cells to produce a reducing atmosphere at the anodes by electrolysis.

11. (New) The method according to claim 10, and further comprising the step of supplying CO₂ to the anodes through a fuel gas inlet in addition to the water vapor.

12. (New) The method in accordance with claim 11, including initially supplying mainly CO₂ for effecting immediate inerting of the anodes, and then reducing an amount of CO₂ that is supplied with increasing supply of water vapor.

13. (New) The method in accordance with claim 10, and further comprising the step of initially supplying mainly CO₂ for effecting immediate inerting of the anodes and subsequently reducing an amount of CO₂ being supplied with increasing supply of water vapor.

14. (New) A fuel cell system, comprising:
at least one fuel cell with an anode and a cathode;
a fuel gas anode inlet for supplying an anode gas to the anode;
a water vapor generator operatively arranged to supply the anode with water vapor to inert the anodes; and
an external voltage source connected to the anode to produce a reducing atmosphere at the anode.

15. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 14, wherein the water vapor and CO₂ are supplied to the anode through the fuel gas inlet.

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16. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 15, wherein mainly CO₂ is initially supplied to effect immediate inerting of the anode and an amount of CO₂ supplied is reduced with an increasing supply of water vapor.

17. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 14, wherein the water vapor generator is connected to the fuel gas inlet for supplying the water vapor to the anode.

18. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 15, wherein the water vapor generator is connected to the fuel gas inlet for supplying the water vapor to the anode.

19. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 16, wherein the water vapor generator is connected to the fuel gas inlet for supplying the water vapor to the anode.

20. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 14, wherein the water vapor generator contains a catalyst.

21. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 15, wherein the water vapor generator is operative to simultaneously produce the CO₂ supplied to the anode.

22. (New) The fuel cell system in accordance with claim 14, including at least two fuel cells.

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